



July 19, 2017

Assemblymember Rob Bonta
State Capitol, Room 2204
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: AB 1479 (Bonta) – Public Records: Civil Penalties – OPPOSE UNLESS AMENDED

Dear Assembly Member Bonta:

As the Executive Director of Laurel District Association, representing the Laurel District merchants in Oakland, I am writing to express our opposition to Assembly Bill 1479, unless amended. The bill would place additional burdens on private non-profit organizations that adhere to the California Public Records Act (“CPRA”). We appreciate the amendments to the bill on July 11 in the Senate Judiciary Committee, but feel additional amendments are needed to protect non-profit, community-based organizations who remain vulnerable to abuse of the CPRA.

The CPRA already provides legal remedies to requestors who feel there have been obstacles. The responsibility of fulfilling these requests often falls on small teams that are stretched to their limits. Our members are required by law to respond to all CPRA requests but there must also be recognition of the significant burden these requests have, in particular serial abuse of the CPRA. On average, our members have an organizational budget under \$250,000 with an average staff of less than two.

Creating a new incentive with a civil penalty provision would create a real economic incentive for those that abuse CPRA to seek not only the penalty, but to also seek attorney’s fees and court costs. This provision poses a serious threat to the viability of our non-profit organizations.

Composed of Property Based Improvement Districts, Business Improvement Districts, and Community Benefit Districts, our core mission is to improve and enhance the environment and economy of Oakland’s urban centers. Covering a wide range of services including maintenance, customer service, marketing, economic development, special events, and other enhanced services or improvements, we play a key role in Oakland to bridge the gap between the public and private sectors. While we receive limited public funding, and work closely with city and county representatives, we do not hold the same land use authority, do not issue permits, nor do we oversee the core public safety services provided by those public agencies. Our role is one of investment, promotion and revitalization within the urban core, and one primarily funded by private sources.

The Laurel District Association fully supports transparency within local government and the need to ensure safe, livable communities throughout our state. However, we believe it is critical to clarify that as it is written today, AB 1479 will unfairly impact private non-profit organizations.

On behalf of the Laurel District Association's board members and merchants, I would ask AB 1479 be amended to restrict its application only to public (governmental) agencies. I look forward to continued conversations with you and your staff to help us address our concerns.

Sincerely,

Daniel Swafford,
Executive Director
Laurel District Association



About Us

The Laurel District Association (LDA) was established in 2005 and renewed in 2015. We are a 501(c)(3) property based Business Improvement District (PBID). Our mission is to revitalize the commercial corridor of the Laurel District, one of Oakland's beloved and most unique communities.

We are committed to increasing the quality of public improvements and educational, cultural, artistic, charitable and social services within the Laurel District and the surrounding neighborhood.

Our Areas of Focus:

District Identity:

We place an emphasis on the marketing, branding and integration of Laurel District, so that we can foster a true sense of community and pride. Specially curated events within the Laurel help establish new connections and foster relationships.

Accomplishments: Merchant Directory, LDA Website & District Logo, Building Unity & Integration Amongst Laurel Business Owners.

Projects: The 18th Annual Laurel World Music Festival on August 12th 2017

Community Advisory Board:

We collaborate with various community & residence groups, including the Neighborhood Crime Prevention Council, Laurel Village, Redwood Heights Community Group, Maxwell Park, Allendale and Brookdale. This allows us to have a deeper understanding of the needs of our residents, visitors and business owners so that we are able to better serve our community.

Accomplishments: Laurel District Identity Summit

Projects: Hosting a series of seminars and workshops to educate the community and create pride within our community.

Land Use:

We oversee development slated for vacant lots, zoning and vacancy issues and business attractions.

Accomplishments: Created a community summit to discuss the C-31 zoning and planned development projects with Laurel District.

Organization:

We allocate a budget for the administration of the Business Improvement District.

Accomplishments: Hiring of an Executive Director, establishing leadership within the organization and key supporting roles.

Projects: We hold monthly meetings and work with consultants to move the organization forward.

Public Rights of Way:

We oversee approved funding for the maintenance, security, and beautification of Laurel District.

Accomplishments: Hiring Oakland's Peralta Services Corporation to remove trash in the district five days a week, steam clean the sidewalks monthly, remove graffiti and perform general maintenance on a weekly basis.

Projects: The Streetscape Character Task Team purchases and maintains planters throughout the district.



Photo of a Laurel District Association Public Art and Facade Improvement Project. Pictured: Kim In Song, Owner of House of Produce



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Facades of the Laurel Improvement Program - A matching grant fund for building and business owners.

Interested In Our Work?

The Board of Directors meets every 3rd Monday at various locations in Laurel District. Please email us for monthly meeting locations:
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About

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Laurel District Association 2015